

INSIDE



Lionel Richie's Story

In the Coolidge Auditorium on Monday evening, the Gershwin Prize-winner spoke about his path from Tuskegee, Alabama, to superstardom.

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Mask-wearing is now optional at the Library, although other pandemic health and safety measures remain in effect.

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Original movie posters from the archival technician's personal collection adorn walls at the National Audio-Visual Conservation Center.

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GERSHWIN PRIZE



Lionel Richie accepts the Gershwin Prize from Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden.

Lionel Richie Brings Back the Gershwin Prize

The all-star concert in his honor melted away pandemic blues.

BY NEELY TUCKER

Lionel Richie smiled, the cameras flashed, the bass thumped, the music soared and the concert celebrating the Gershwin Prize for Popular Song popped back into life two years after COVID-19 shut down much of public life in the nation's capital.

It was a misty, chilly night outside Constitution Hall, but the crowd warmed up as soon as the house lights dimmed, getting on their feet for Gloria Estefan's show-opening version of "Dancing on the Ceiling"

and later raising hands above their heads and swaying to Boyz II Men's cover of "Easy."

"I don't know about all of you, but I'm just glad to be out of the house," emcee Anthony Anderson quipped in his opening monologue, drawing an enthusiastic round of applause. "We're here. We're wearing proper pants."

It really did seem that easy, with two years of pandemic shutdown blahs melting away. It was the first Gershwin concert since 2020,

GERSHWIN PRIZE, CONTINUED ON 8

Shawn Miller

NOTICES

DONATED TIME

The following employees have satisfied eligibility requirements to receive leave donations from other staff members. Contact Amy McAllister at amcallister@loc.gov.

Lynette Brown
Avraham "Avi" Shapiro

CHECK YOUR SMARTRIP CARD

First-generation SmartTrip cards are no longer being accepted. If a plastic card number does not start with 0167, then it is a first-generation card and must be replaced. You can purchase a new SmartTrip card at a Metro station kiosk at any time and register it online. If you replace your SmartTrip card, you must submit a modification in the transit subsidy request application on the [Human Capital Directorate \(HCD\) portal](#).

Questions? Submit them to [AskHCD](#) or AskHR@loc.gov.

LIBRARY SURPASSES CFC FUNDRAISING GOAL

The Library raised \$372,193 during the 2021 Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), surpassing its goal to collect \$300,000, chairs for the campaign announced last week.

For more information, visit the [Library's CFC site](#).

REMINDER: REPORT COVID SYMPTOMS, EXPOSURE

All Library employees, including those working remotely, who have [experienced symptoms of COVID-19](#), received a positive COVID test result or had close contact with someone with COVID-19 are required to send a message to their supervisors and copy the Health Services Division (HSD) at HSDCOVID-check-in@loc.gov.

The email to HSD should include the employee's name in the subject line and a reachable email address and telephone number in the body of the message. HSD will follow up to ensure that affected employees remain off-site for the appropriate amount of time and confirm that contact tracing is not necessary.

GAZETTE

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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MISSION OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Library's central mission is to engage, inspire and inform Congress and the American people with a universal and enduring source of knowledge and creativity.

ABOUT THE GAZETTE

An official publication of the Library of Congress, The Gazette encourages Library managers and staff to submit articles and photographs of general interest. Submissions will be edited to convey the most necessary information.

Back issues of The Gazette in print are available in the Communications Office, LM 143. Electronic archived issues and a color PDF file of the current issue are available online at loc.gov/staff/gazette.

GAZETTE WELCOMES LETTERS FROM STAFF

Staff members are invited to use the Gazette for lively and thoughtful debate relevant to Library issues. Letters must be signed by the author, whose place of work and telephone extension should be included so we can verify authorship. If a letter calls for management response, an explanation of a policy or actions or clarification of fact, we will ask for management response.—Ed.

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GAZETTE DEADLINES

The deadline for editorial copy for the March 25 Gazette is Wednesday, March 16.

Email editorial copy and letters to the editor to mhartsell@loc.gov and wmal@loc.gov.

To promote events through the Library's online calendar (www.loc.gov/loc/events) and the Gazette Calendar, email event and contact information to calendar@loc.gov by 9 a.m. Monday of the week of publication.

Boxed announcements should be submitted electronically (text files) by 9 a.m. Monday the week of publication to mhartsell@loc.gov and wmal@loc.gov.

Richie Brings the Coolidge Back to Life with His Story

Librarian of Congress
 Carla Hayden
 interviewed the
 superstar.

BY WENDI A. MALONEY

The Library kicked off its three-day celebration of Lionel Richie on Monday evening when Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden spoke with the pop music icon onstage in the Coolidge Auditorium.

She quizzed Richie about his growing-up years in Tuskegee, Alabama, his almost otherworldly songwriting process and the continuing relevance of “We Are the World,” the 1985 Grammy-winning mega-hit he wrote with Michael Jackson to raise money for African famine relief.

Richie accepted the Library’s 2022 Gershwin Prize for Popular Song on Wednesday during an all-star tribute concert in Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C.

“Is this real, or am I being punked?” That’s what Richie recalled thinking when he received Hayden’s call about the prize. “And then I realized, oh my God, it’s real. When you say Gershwin, that’s the holy grail.”

“I was going after Stevie, I’m going after Marvin, I’m going after Elton,” he said of his ambitions. “I wasn’t going after George Gershwin.”

Richie’s conversation with Hayden was one of the Coolidge’s first post-pandemic in-person events. “We couldn’t think of a better occasion [or] a better person to bring us back,” Hayden said.

Richie spoke with pride of being “born and raised on the campus of Tuskegee University,” surrounded by its rich cultural environment. “Tuskegee was probably the best thing that ever happened to me. I was raised by some pretty amazing people.”

He grew up, he said, “in a town where everybody was a doctor, a lawyer, double Ph.D.s, airmen,” a



Elaina Finkelstein

Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden with Lionel Richie in the Coolidge Auditorium on March 7.

reference to the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II, the first Black military aviators in the U.S. Army.

Richie said he didn’t even realize the airmen were famous until he was 13 or 14. Watching “The 20th Century with Walter Cronkite,” a series documenting the century’s major events, “We didn’t see the Tuskegee Airmen. We didn’t see any Black troops,” he said.

While himself attending Tuskegee University – he has a degree in economics – he became the lead singer for the Commodores, made up of fellow students, and he started writing songs.

The band formed, he said, with one strategic goal in mind: girls. “We had no idea of money and didn’t care. All we knew was, if we started a band, we could meet all the girls on the campus.”

But the Commodores took off, eventually signing with Motown. At first, Richie’s family wasn’t happy about his decidedly nonacademic career choice. But things changed with his success.

“I found that your parents’ attitude will change instantly when you say, ‘Dad, I got a million dollars right here,’” Richie joked.

After steering the Commodores to fame, Richie went on to a massively successful solo career. He has sold more than 125 million albums worldwide. He has been awarded an Oscar, a Golden Globe and four Grammys, and he was a Kennedy Center honoree in 2017.

Yet, he never learned to read music. His grandmother, a concert pianist who sang with the Fisk Jubilee Singers in college, tried to teach him when he was a child. He watched her perform and could play songs from memory, but he never picked up reading music on his own.

He connects his difficulty to what is now called attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. “I was living somewhere else in my brain,” he said.

The tendency for his mind to drift ended up being the secret to his songwriting. “I receive music ... it just comes,” he said. “What happens when I’m over there, I hear wonderful, wonderful phrases of love.”

Richie called writing “We Are the World” with Jackson “one of the magical mystery tours of life.” At

IN CONVERSATION, CONTINUED ON 4

Library Updates Guidance on Masking

Following updated recommendations on masking from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Office of the Attending Physician (OAP), coupled with the current low level of community transmission of COVID-19 in the Washington, D.C., area, the Library announced a mask-optional policy for most staff in Library buildings on Capitol Hill last week, effective March 3.

The requirement for visitors and researchers to wear masks will continue until March 14 to allow time to adjust operations. Staff working in reading rooms and certain other public spaces will continue to wear masks until March 14 as well.

This week, citing a decline from high- to medium-level COVID-19 community transmission in

Culpeper, Virginia, the Library implemented a mask-optional policy at the National Audio-Visual Conservation Center as well.

This decision, outlined in [Special Announcement 22-05](#), is in line with guidance from the CDC, the OAP and the Office of Management and Budget. The Library's Health Services Division (HSD), led by Dr. Sandra Charles, will continue to monitor COVID-19 conditions and update the masking policy and other health and safety policies as conditions change.

In announcing the new policy, the Library noted that other COVID-19 prevention policies will remain in place for all Library buildings until further notice. Employees must continue to use the [daily health screening tool](#) to monitor for symptoms

and stay home when they have symptoms or are ill. Researchers, visitors and other guests must follow similar procedures.

In addition, distancing of at least 6 feet should be maintained whenever possible (12 feet when eating or drinking), and masks are recommended when staff cannot maintain that level of separation. The Library continues to ask staff to wash their hands and use sanitizer regularly as well.

Under the new policy, Library staff may choose to continue wearing masks, and they are welcome to do so. Library leaders ask staff to respect the decisions of colleagues about whether or not to wear masks.

Questions? Contact HSD at hso@loc.gov. ■

GERSHWIN PRIZE

IN CONVERSATION, CONTINUED FROM 3

one point, when the pair were laying on the floor of Jackson's room hammering out lyrics, an enormous snake crawled up. Unbeknownst to Richie, Jackson had brought the snake, a pet, to the writing session. "I was screaming so loud," Richie said.

Drama aside, he and Jackson were very attuned as songwriters. "We knew where to go, he understood," Richie said.

Sadly, he added, "I'm afraid that the words that we wrote 30 some odd years ago still apply" given the problems now tearing the world apart.

Toward the end of the evening, Susan Vita of the Music Division presented Richie with a facsimile of the first sheet music published by an African American composer, Francis Johnson. A popular 19th-century dance band leader, he was known for hiring the best African American performers

and nurturing their careers.

"He was actually very much like you in 'American Idol,'" Vita told Richie. He has been a judge on ABC's "American Idol" for the past four seasons, making it a point to mentor young contestants.

On Tuesday, Richie viewed more gems from the collections — originals this time — in a display in the Main Reading Room. Included were copyright deposits for songs Richie wrote; sketches of "Love Is Here to Stay" and "Who Cares?" by George Gershwin; the manuscript of Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5; a single of "Listen Here" by Eddie Harris (Commodores guitarist Thomas McClary says he met Richie when he heard Richie whistling the tune); and



With Ray White of the Music Division, Richie looks at a holograph manuscript music sketchbook George Gershwin used to jot down ideas for tunes.

a disc and audio of a 1938 NBC broadcast of the Tuskegee Choir performing under the direction of William L. Dawson, a close friend of Richie's grandmother.

A recording of Monday's conversation is available on the [Library's YouTube channel](#). ■

Shawn Miller

GERSHWIN PRIZE



Anthony Anderson emcees the all-star tribute.



Gloria Estefan raises the roof with her rendition of "Dancing on the Ceiling."



Andra Day sings "Hello."



Boyz II Men channel Richie with a cover of "Easy."



Chris Stapleton sings Richie's Oscar-winning ballad, "Say You, Say Me."



Lionel Richie takes the stage.



Shawn Miller

Country music star and “American Idol” judge Luke Bryan sings “Lady.”



Shawn Miller

Miguel sings “You Are.”



Shawn Miller

Yolanda Adams belts out gospel.



Elaina Finklestein

Richie closes the evening with “We Are the World” and “All Night Long.”



Photo courtesy of John Snelson

John Snelson

John Snelson is an archival technician at the National Audio-Visual Conservation Center.

Tell us about your background.

I grew up in the Appalachian Mountains. My father was a Victorian literature professor, woodworker, puppeteer and luthier, so most of my childhood consisted of reading, sanding wood and demonstrating a lack of musical talent.

What I did excel at was watching foreign films on PBS. I went to film school in Baltimore and later spent my time filming, rewriting, editing and denying my involvement in many films that would best be forgotten.

I have had many jobs over the years, including ice cream truck driver, shopping center Easter bunny and complaints department representative for the National Park Service.

When I first started working at the Library, people called me “le video clerk” because my previous job had been running and curating the collection for Maryland and Washington D.C.’s premiere video store chain, Video Americain, which specialized in impossible-to-find films from around the world. My

obscure and often particular film references may have also strengthened that nickname.

What brought you to the Library, and what do you do?

Several Library employees who were customers at Video Americain would pick my brain for suggestions of little-known titles to screen at the Mary Pickford Theater. They told me about an open position to run the Elkwood, Virginia, facility where the Library stored some of its moving-images collection before NAVCC opened.

Pat Loughney, head of the head of Moving Image Section at the time, didn’t hide the fact that no one wanted to do it, and he recommended that I really think it over before taking the position. I had just recently been offered another job for an armored truck company, which would have required me to sit in the back of a truck with a shotgun to prevent robberies. Needless to say, the Library seemed a bit safer.

During my time at the Library, I have done extensive research into every aspect of how films are put together. This knowledge has helped me in my work processing and curating special film collections.

What are some of your standout projects?

One standout project has been the very large and complex Jerry Lewis Collection. I inspected every inch of film in that collection and worked extensively with both our film lab and the cataloging staff to ensure that every element was properly identified and discoverable. Although the project was initially estimated to take over three years, I was able to develop techniques and practices that made it possible to complete it within eight months.

Using what I learned from that collection, I have formed a “bulk processing” area to handle large and unwieldy collections quickly and accurately. I have been fortunate enough to train and oversee volunteers in these techniques. We

have been able to complete anywhere between 1,000 and 14,000 reels a month when we had originally crossed our fingers to complete 300. Because of this, one of my supervisors was kind enough to dub me the King of Arrearage.

I am now working on the Prelinger Collection. It is our largest unprocessed film collection, and it is filled with gems. These include original materials for films directed by the Coen Brothers, Robert Altman, Robert Downey Sr. and the Maysles Brothers, to name a few. The [Rolling Stones home movies](#) that were recently published on our blog came from this collection.

What do you enjoy doing outside work?

I enjoy working on new film productions when I can. Recently, two friends of mine got their separate feature films greenlit with healthy budgets. I have been helping by script doctoring their screenplays and altering my 16 mm cameras and lenses to achieve certain filming effects for them. Rebuilding and customizing old cameras to keep 16 mm a viable film format for future projects is a passion of mine.

I also enjoy collecting original movie posters. I’ve been fortunate enough to have been given the opportunity to hang many of the posters that I have collected on the walls of NAVCC. (I’m standing in front of two of the posters in the picture to the left.)

The size of these posters – 40 by 60 inches or larger – makes them rarities. They include original posters for “Chinatown,” “Wattstax,” “Jaws,” “A Place in the Sun,” “Le Samourai,” “The Wild Bunch” and even a six-sheet (81-by-81-inch) poster of “Carmen Jones” featuring Dorothy Dandridge.

The staff response has been overwhelmingly positive, and hopefully, we can hang more posters in the future. ■

GERSHWIN PRIZE

GERSHWIN PRIZE, CONTINUED FROM 1

when Garth Brooks and friends rocked the house.

"This is absolutely outrageous," Richie said when Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden formally presented him with the Gershwin Prize onstage, flanked by members of Congress. He invoked his Alabama roots, adding, "As my grandmother would say, 'This is about as high a cotton as you're ever gonna get.'"

The show, taped before a mostly full house (pandemic restrictions still meant that masks were mandatory), will be broadcast on PBS stations at 9 p.m. on May 17 and on PBS.org and the PBS video app as part of the co-produced Emmy Award-winning music series.

The Gershwin Prize is named for George and Ira Gershwin, the brothers who wrote much of the American songbook in the early to mid-20th century and whose papers are preserved at the Library.

The prize honors a living musician's work. The Librarian chooses the honoree after consulting with a panel of music specialists from across the industry. Previous recipients, in order, are Paul Simon, Stevie Wonder, Sir Paul McCartney, songwriting duo Burt Bacharach and the late Hal David, Carole King, Billy Joel, Willie Nelson, Smokey Robinson, Tony Bennett, Emilio and Gloria Estefan and the most recent honoree, Brooks.

"In so many ways, the Gershwin Prize was made for Lionel Richie," Hayden said at the show.

Richie, born in Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1949, was a student at the town's famed university when he joined the Commodores in 1968. The band hit its stride in the mid-'70s with huge hits such as "Brick House," "Three Times a Lady," "Still" and "Easy." He then launched into his own career and another stratosphere of success, going on an 11-year run of writing No. 1 hits.

His self-titled debut album sold four million copies; the follow-up, "Can't Slow Down," sold 20 million.

His hits during that span included "Endless Love," "Truly," "All Night Long" and "Dancing on the Ceiling." With Michael Jackson, he co-wrote "We Are the World," a 1985 ballad by a group of all-star performers that raised more than \$65 million for famine relief. The music video of the song became a cultural milestone of the '80s.

Richie's career as a singer, songwriter and producer kept going. He's won an Oscar, a Golden Globe and four Grammy Awards and sold 125 million albums. Since 2018, he's known to a new generation of fans as a judge on "American Idol."

The show capping that career had a fun vibe all night. At the red carpet step and repeat before the concert started, fellow "Idol" judge Luke Bryan – no slouch himself, having sold more than 75 million albums – charmed the line of reporters and photographers with stories of growing up listening to Richie on the radio, then working alongside him.

"Anytime I have to sing Lionel Richie songs, I don't have to do much homework," he said. "I just have to go out there and karaoke."

The show, as always, was part concert, part taped television show.

The stage setup was spare. There was a rhythm section to the audi-

ence's left, with two keyboards and a pair of backup singers to the right. The screen behind the stage showed clips from Richie's career during the short breaks between performances. Richie and girlfriend Lisa Parigi sat in the honoree's box to the left of the stage, next to Hayden.

Onstage, Andra Day dazzled, both in her baby-blue outfit and her rendition of "Hello." Chris Stapleton – who also performed at the Gershwin concert for Brooks – came out in all black to sing Richie's Oscar-winning ballad, "Say You, Say Me." Bryan played a baby grand piano to sing "Lady." Miguel did a smooth rendition of "You Are," Yolanda Adams belted out gospel and before you knew it, Richie was closing the evening with two songs, "We Are the World" and, of course, "All Night Long."

For Richie, his career of genre-crossing hits, popular with international audiences across the racial and economic spectrum, has always been about what unites people.

"Love is the only answer to everything we're doing," he said in his brief acceptance speech. "We may live in different places, but these songs are as popular on the other side of the world as they are here in D.C. ... We're a family, not a tribe. We're a family, not a party." ■

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